

# Information: Implementation of MRV Fee Increase

**May 2010**

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## Summary

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On June 4, the Department will increase the Machine-Readable Visa (MRV) and Border Crossing Card (BCC) fees to ensure sufficient resources to meet the increasing cost of processing nonimmigrant visas (NIVs). The new MRV fee for H, L, O, P, Q and R visas will be \$150; for E visas \$390, and K visas \$350. All other categories, including B-1/B-2, F, J, and adult BCCs, will increase to \$140. The fee for BCCs for minors will increase from \$13 to \$14 by virtue of a congressionally mandated surcharge.

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## Why is the Department of State increasing the basic nonimmigrant visa application fee to \$140 from its current amount of \$131?

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The Department is required by law to recover the cost of processing nonimmigrant visas through the collection of the MRV fee. Periodically, independent contractors conduct a Cost of Service Study to determine direct and indirect costs to the U.S. Government of providing consular services, such as nonimmigrant visa processing. Such a study was completed in June 2009 using an activity-based costing model, which is standard for estimating the cost of government services.

The study determined that the cost of accepting, adjudicating, and issuing nonimmigrant visas will be greater than \$131 in Fiscal Year 2010, which began October 1, 2009. Also, since the last fee increase in 2008, there have been new security-related costs, new IT systems have been put in place, and there is a new mandate from Congress to charge nonimmigrant visa applicants \$1 to support programs to combat trafficking in persons.

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## When do the new processing fees go into effect?

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The new fees will be implemented on June 4, 2010, which is 15 days after the interim final rule was published.

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## What if I already paid my fee, for an appointment after June 4<sup>th</sup>?

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Applicants will have to pay the full fee in effect on the day they apply, regardless of when they pay. Please check the website of the embassy or consulate where you are applying for instructions on how to pay the difference.

### **Can I comment on these fees?**

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The Department is publishing additional cost of service data for nonimmigrant visas with the rule, and will accept public comments on that data for 60 days (until July 19, 2010). The public may comment in any of the ways laid out in the rule published on [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov). Later this summer, the Department will review and consider any comments received from the public and publish a final rule.

### **Why is the Department establishing new, higher fees for certain types of nonimmigrant visas which previously cost \$131, the same as all other nonimmigrant visas?**

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An independent study of consular operations costs shows that certain categories of nonimmigrant visas are more complicated and require more in-depth consideration than most other categories of nonimmigrant visas. Therefore, those categories of nonimmigrant visas have higher unit costs. The cost of accepting, adjudicating, and issuing the following categories of visas are appreciably higher than for other categories: E (treaty trader and investor); H (temporary worker or trainee); K (fiancé(e)); L (intracompany transferee); O (alien with extraordinary ability); P (athlete, artist or entertainer); Q (international cultural exchange visitors); and R (religious worker). Each of these visa categories requires a review of extensive documentation and a more in-depth interview of the applicant than other categories, such as tourists.

### **Will this fee increase discourage people from traveling to the United States?**

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The proposed fees accurately reflect the processing costs incurred and regulations require full cost recovery through fees. Past increases in nonimmigrant visa fees did not negatively impact the number of applications received worldwide. The Department is aware that this fee increase may suppress the demand for nonimmigrant visas in some countries. However, the cost is still small compared to the cost of round-trip airfare from most countries to the United States. Most visas issued worldwide are tourist visas with a validity of ten years, meaning the bearer can apply for admission to the United States any time during that ten-year period.

### **Will other countries respond by increasing the visa fees they charge American citizens?**

While some countries may increase visa fees, we expect many will not because, under the principle of reciprocity, we will be able to offset the nonimmigrant fees increase with a simultaneous reduction in reciprocity fees. For some countries, the

combined total of nonimmigrant visa fees and reciprocal issuance fees will remain the same.

#### **How does this MRV processing fee differ from reciprocal issuance fees?**

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The MRV processing fee is paid by all visa applicants, worldwide, with certain limited exceptions, for example, those pertaining to government officials. It must be paid in advance, whether or not the visa is granted.

The reciprocal issuance fee is an additional charge paid by visa applicants from certain countries in certain categories and is based on fees U.S. citizens are charged for similar visas to visit those countries. The U.S. reciprocity fee is charged only if the U.S. visa is granted.